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The proper Happineſs of the Eccleſiaſtic Life, in a public and a private Sphere.

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SERMON

Preached before the Right Reverend

The LORD BISHOP of BATH and WELLS,

At his primary Viſitation at AXBRIDGE,

JULY 4, 1776.

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DEUT. xxviii. 2, 3.

If Thou wilt hearken unto the Voice of the Lord thy God,—Bleſſed ſhalt thou be in the City, and bleſſed ſhalt Thou be in the Field.

IT is on this Principle of religious Obedience that human Happineſs has reſted, ever ſince it was known to Man that He had a Maker. When He came from *his* Hand on the great Solitude of Creation, DO THIS AND LIVE, was the firſt Precept of his Being. He diſobeyed, and fell from the Privileges of his Nature. This was conſequentially neceſſary. It is worthy of what might, with Propriety, be called the firſt Philoſophy, it is worthy of the beſt Degree of human Intelligence to believe that He who made Him, alone was capable of *ordering his Goings*.

IT is on the ſame great Principle that the little Remains of our earthly Happineſs ſtill does and muſt finally

finally repoſe. Ideas of the moral Beauty and Obligation, of the eternal and invariable Fitneſs of Things may amuſe the Moments of ſpeculative Ingenuity; It was needful for the Infirmities of Man, that his Duty ſhould be brought more eſſentially home to Him, *Precept upon Precept, and Line upon Line.*

THIS Argument is, indeed, of a general Tendency, reaching the Intereſts of all Orders and Denominations of Men; yet may I be indulged, if, on this Occaſion, I conſider more particularly THE PROPER HAPPINESS OF THE ECCLESIASTIC LIFE, IN A PUBLIC AND A PRIVATE SPHERE. *Bleſſed ſhalt Thou be in the City, and bleſſed ſhalt Thou be in the Field.*

Cometh then this Bleſſedneſs on the Circumciſion only, or on the Uncircumciſion alſo? Not on the Circumciſion only, but on the Uncircumciſion alſo. Modes of Faith, and Diſtinctions of Perſwaſion *here* plead no Privilege, and are expoſed to no Prejudice. *If thou wilt hearken to the Voice of the Lord thy God,* is the ſimple conditional Precept; and let *us,* then, with the greateſt Charity of Opinion for all who may lay hold of it, ſee how it will bring Home to ourſelves the Benediction pronounced upon it.

I. IT was the Pleaſure of our great and gracious Maſter, that whilſt ſome of his Diſciples ſhould withdrawn

draw with Him into the Wilderneſs, others ſhould be brought before Rulers and Kings for his Name's Sake; that whilſt ſome ſhould ſeek his heavenly Father in the Sanctity of Solitude, others ſhould be a burning and a ſhining Light, adorn his Doctrine, and diffuſe his Knowledge.

THIS public Capacity is the more honourable, the more important Part of our Embaſſy; yet *is* it not the more arduous, more expoſed to difficulty and danger?—For, of what Powers, of what Graces ought not He to poſſeſs Himſelf, who thus eminently bears before Him this heavenly Treaſure? It is true, He muſt remember that He has *this Treaſure in earthly Veſſels*, yet what Care, what Aſſiduity ſhould not the Remembrance excite? How guarded muſt He hold Himſelf in all the minuter Deportments of Life! How cautious *even* of the unbended Hour, the Advances of Complacency or Inattention!—Like the Cyrenian, compelled to bear the Croſs, all Eyes are turned upon Him; and what ſhould adminiſter to Him either Conſolation or Support, but that he is walking in the ſteady Line of Duty, and *hearkening to the Voice of the Lord his God?*—This is his proper Happineſs, the Reflection that muſt ingratiate every Circumſtance of Life.

THIS is, indeed, the *great* Source of his Happineſs; yet others are not wanting.—For can he be without that divine Satisfaction, that Glory of reflecting that he is making ſmooth the Footſteps of his amiable Lord?—That He is advancing his gracious Wiſhes, and benevolent Intereſts, by Precept, by Example, by Forbearance, by Inſtruction. That whilſt He toils in the narrow Paths of Duty, yet in that religious Security, attending our happy Eſtabliſhment, *He findeth an Hedge ſet about Him and about his Houſe, and about all that He hath.*

AND, here I ſhall hardly be thought to digreſs, if, whilſt I ſpeak of the proper Happineſs of the Eccleſiaſtic in a public Sphere more particularly, I contemplate that Superiority and thoſe Advantages He enjoys in the Boſom of our excellent Church, compared with the Religious of other Countries.

LET us caſt our Eyes on the fair Fields of *Italy*, the *Campagna di Roma*, the Garden of the World! That beauteous Region, of which *Florus* not more elegantly than juſtly ſays, *Nihil Mollius Cælo, nihil uberius Solo, nihil hoſpitalius Mari!*—Under theſe natural Advantages, the ſecular Clergy have neither the Enjoyment, nor the Idea of rational Felicity. Attend to the Condition of one of ſuperior Rank. His Soul is the Seat of Ambiguity and Suſpicion; his conduct

is artificial; his Devotion irrational; if ſerious, ſuperſtitious; if affected, ridiculous;—a Stranger to that tender and confidential Connection, which alone can ſoften the Cares, or animate the Intereſts of Life, He paſſes through Being with unpleaſurable Langour, or with unmollified Moroſity.—-Nor can the various Charm of Learning relieve the Melancholy of his Hours: His Studies, like his Sentiments, are limited, and Books of liberal Knowledge ſecluded from his View.—His public Labours are not leſs pitiable than his private Life. Bred in the Circle of romantic Ceremonies and frivolous Inſtitutions, he has acquired no noble, no worthy Ideas of Religion.—Unlike the Veſture of his Saviour, that was woven without Seam throughout, his Theology reſembles the Coat of Joſeph, which his Mother had made of divers Colours, and which his Brethren brought home to her, STAINED WITH BLOOD!

THE Matter of his public Diſcourſes is a whimſical Texture of paganiſed Fanaticiſm, uttered with a Grimace of Action, and Geſticulations as whimſical.

THE ſame Character will ſit upon the Pole, the Spaniard and the Portugueze, and, if we except the Eloquence of his Pulpit and the natural Hilarity of his Heart, on the Frenchman too.

To aſſociate Religion with liberal Ideas is the great Characteriſtic of our national Church. And hence our Profeſſors, in the moſt eminent and moſt painful Stations, derive a Satisfaction which to others is unknown. Their own Hearts bearing them Witneſs that they are offering a reaſonable Service, every Diſcharge of Duty becomes a Source of Pleaſure. Conſcious that they labour not to impoſe on the Underſtanding, but to cultivate the Morals of Mankind, not to amuſe devoted Ignorance with the Trappings of Religion, but to lead the Heart to Piety through the Path of Reaſon, they at once magnify their Office and conſult their proper Happineſs.

II. For us, my Brethren, who move in the private Sphere of Duty, whom Heaven has indulged with humbler Labours, and to whom it has lent humbler Talents, our Felicity is more eaſily ſecured. For, what have we to do, but to hearken to the Voice of the everlaſting Shepherd, embrace his laſt Precept, and *feed his Sheep?*

There is ſomething wonderfully pleaſing and amiable in this Paſtoral Idea of our Duty; and, ſure, our gracious Maſter alluded thereby to the Simplicity and Humility of our Situation;—a Situation which, however Folly may diſparage, or Pride diſdain, is more to be deſired than the moſt ſplendid Allotments.

O more

O more to be desired! For, are they not thy Ensigns, O blessed Jesus! Are they not thy Auspices under which we serve? And do we not count it Joy that we are *thy* Servants? And is not one Day in thy Courts better than a Thousand? O better than Ten Thousand, devoted to the Vanity of mortal Pursuits!

Behold here, my Reverend Brethren, a Source of the sublimest, yet most rational Pleasures,—of Ideas which might give even unpromised Immortality, which alone might animate our Being for ever!—Are we warmed with this glorious Subject? Let us never be ashamed of such a Warmth.—Could we speak with the Tongue of Men and of Angels, and had we all Learning and all Knowledge, we might on this Occasion say with the Prophet, *for the Love of thy Gates, O Daughter of Zion, my Strength hath failed me, and my Voice.*

It is from these animating Reflections, attending the Idea of the Dignity of our Office, that much of our Happiness is derived. And it is by *these* too that much of our Misery must be alleviated.—Remembering that our Lord Himself was a Man of Sorrows, we shall call to mind the Subjects of his Consolation. We shall remember that *these* were his divine Commission, and his Obedience to the Will of his heavenly Father.—The same exalted Considerations must be our

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invariable Support—and the Senſe of our more immediate Connection with the Service of the divine Providence reconcile us to thoſe natural or moral Evils from which no Condition of Mortality is ſecure. Are we then Partakers in any of the Diſtreſſes of our common Nature, Affliction for the Loſs of Friends, or Poverty, or Pain?—It is a Part of our Belief, that Adverſity ſpringeth not out of the Duſt. Theſe may be our Father's Meſſengers ſtill, and we will receive them without murmuring, becauſe they come as Friends.

But, bleſſed be the benevolent Hand which ſcattereth his Bounty upon us, we have in general more Reaſon to rejoice in his Favours, than to reſign to his Inflictions.

Is the Privacy of our Condition any Complaint in our Fortunes? Truſt me (and you may rely on the Experience of one who has known both Situations) the beſt Bleſſings of Life are in the Boſom of Nature and Retirement,—in that calm Repoſe, and thoſe quiet Allotments, where Science is the Support of Virtue. Where we may at Leiſure reap the pureſt of all human Pleaſures in the fair Fruits of Learning, —in the Cultivation of lettered Elegance and humanizing Philoſophy, the genuine Sources of that Philanthropy which is the firſt Ornament of our moral Nature.

HERE it is that, unembarraſſed with public Cares, and unwithdrawn by worldly Attentions, the Mind is ready addreſſed to its Duty—Here it is that we contemplate the Wiſdom of our Almighty Maker on the fair Theatre of his Works, and, literally, like the Patriarch, walk with God.

THE Study of Nature is the great School of Devotion; whilſt it illumines the Underſtanding, it inſpires the Heart. Who can behold that Œconomy which runs through the Syſtem of the Univerſe, and bring his Thoughts home to him, unimpreſſed with the Senſe of a Deity?

NOT ſo the great Naturaliſt—when he is contemplating certain Phænomena of Nature, for which no human Sagacity can account, with equal Eloquence and Religion he thus expreſſes himſelf, *Quibus in Rebus quid poſſit aliud afferre Cauſæ mortalium Quiſpiam, quam diffuſæ per Omne Naturæ, ſubinde, aliter, aliterque* NUMEN ERUMPENS! This was a natural Act of Devotion—That by the *Numen* of the Ancients was generally ſignified the univerſal Agency of Providence I need not, in the Place where I now ſtand, demonſtrate; I need only obſerve that the ſame Inveſtigations muſt, in a liberal and enlightened Mind, ever Produce the ſame Reflections; that the Retirement of our Condition is moſt favourable to ſuch Purſuits;

Purſuits; and that they muſt be in no inferior Degree conducive to our proper Happineſs.

But Learning in a Clergyman is not merely a perſonal Thing. It is eſſential to the Honour and to the Intereſts of his Order; and it is by this, no leſs than by his ſacred Office, that he ſhould ſtand diſtinguiſhed from the Reſt of Society. *Get Wiſdom* is a Precept of divine Origin, and as it applies more particularly to *him*, he *muſt* attend to it, if he hearken to the Voice of his God. In one of *our* Profeſſion, Ignorance is a Kind of Impiety; and no leſs diſgraceful, than it is pardonable in the Peaſant, or the Mechanic.

A Knowledge of the religious and civil Hiſtory of Mankind, a competent Acquaintance with natural Science, a Command of Languages, on which the Fruitfulneſs of Ideas depends more than may be generally imagined, and a large Share of Moral and Theological Learning are among thoſe Attainments that ſhould be the Objects of our Labour.—Nor let the miſerable Envy that falls upon diſtinguiſhed Parts repreſs our Ardor in the Purſuit, nor let it unbend our Induſtry that *Favour is not unto Men of Skill*;—aſſured that Science no leſs than Virtue is its own Reward.

We live at a Time when the Clergy on the Continent, more particularly the Religious of France, are diſtinguiſhing

diſtinguiſhing themſelves by every Species of Erudition. And, as it muſt be remembered that the Reputation of an Engliſh Divine ſtands foremoſt on the Eccleſiaſtical Annals of Europe, ſo we ought, as well for our own Credit, as for the Intereſt of the reformed Religion, to Uſe our beſt Endeavours for its Support.

I HAVE my Fears, however, that there is ſome Remiſſneſs in this Reſpect—that there is a faſhionable Kind of Luxury intruding upon us, I mean the **Luxury of Idleneſs**;—which is, at the ſame Time, of ſuch a magical Quality, that ſome will not even be at the Pains to ſuſpect their own Want of Science. οὐκ αἰσθανομενων της ἑαυτων ἀμαθιας, as *Origen* elegantly and ſtrongly expreſſes it.

YOUR Indulgence would fail me, were I to attend to every Circumſtance of our peculiar Happineſs, yet I would wiſh to mention our Friendſhips and our Choice of Society:—For even Friendſhip, that Spark of celeſtial Fire, which catches the ſooneſt and burns the brighteſt in Minds of the ſtrongeſt Metal and the trueſt Temper, even Friendſhip has Dangers that may draw us from our Duty. Remember we not the Roman, who being aſked whether he was not inſtigated by his Friend to ſet Fire to the Capitol, anſwered, "No; but if my Friend had deſired me, I "would have done it." I take Notice of this only

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on Account of that Spirit of Libertiniſm and Infidelity which is gone abroad, and merely to intimate that we ſhould be cautious of connecting ourſelves with men of ſuch a Turn, whatever Advantages of Fortune they may enjoy.

NEITHER would it be for our Happineſs to miſpend our Time, and miſemploy our Talents in attempting Innovations in Religion. Our Labour, ſo directed, would have the Merit of that of the Pilot, who ſhould ſtrive to make his Veſſel rock from Side to Side, inſtead of working it forward before an even Gale.

HERE I ſee a wide Field inviting my Attention, but it muſt not ſeduce me to weary yours. Pardon me for the Liberties I have already taken; and forgive me if I have appeared to teach, where, I am ſure, I ought to learn.

IN one Word, all Sects and Opinions apart, let us evermore remember that religious Obedience is the firſt Principle of all human Happineſs; and that if we hearken to the Voice of the Lord our God, Bleſſed ſhall we be in the City, and bleſſed ſhall we be in the Field.

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